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A SPECULATION REGARDING SHAKESPEARE

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Whether with or without reason, it has long been regarded as a wonderful fact that so little is definitely known concerning the life of Shakespeare, that prodigy described in the words of Carlyle as "the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world, has left record of himself in the way of literature." In spite of the mass of detail which has been brought together by a laborious investigation "extending over two hundred years"—an amount of circumstantial evidence which "far exceeds that accessible in the case of any other contemporary professional writer"¹—only a few scattered rays of light have been shed upon the personality and conduct of the man who "was not of an age, but for all time!"

"Shakespeare's will is in our hands," writes the historian Ward, "but there is little or nothing to be read out of it which reveals to us even the slightest corner of his life or character."² After all the voluminous results of nineteenth-century research have been carefully and discriminatingly sifted, we find ourselves no nearer to the mystery of the man Shakespeare than were our eighteenth-century ancestors. Nothing of essential importance has been added to the story of his life as briefly summarized by the antiquarian Steevens, more than a century ago. "All," said he, "that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is—that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced actor and wrote poems and plays; returned to Stratford, made his will, died and was buried." The Danish scholar, Brandes, who begins his entertaining and erratic *Critical Study* with the admission that "a biography of Shakespeare is difficult, but not impossible,"³ repeats the facts which his predecessors

¹ Sidney Lee, *Shakespeare's Life and Work*.

² A. W. Ward, *A History of English Dramatic Literature*.

³ Georg Brandes, *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*.

furnish, adding little that is new except the stuff of his ingenious dreams. And Sidney Lee concludes that, though "the fully ascertained facts are numerous enough to define sharply the general direction that Shakespeare's career followed," nevertheless, "some important links are missing, and at some critical points appeal to conjecture is inevitable."¹ According to Emerson, "Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare; and even he can tell nothing, except to the Shakespeare in us; that is, to our most apprehensive and sympathetic hour."

Especially meager are the data relating to Shakespeare's plans and occupations subsequent to his retirement to Stratford, about the year 1611.

Rev. John Ward, who from 1662 to 1668 was vicar of Stratford, left a diary in which he said:

I have heard that Mr. Shakespeare was a natural wit, without any art at all; he frequented the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford and supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for it had an allowance so large, that hee spent att the rate of 1000 l. a year, as I have heard. Shakespear, Drayton and Jhonson, had a merie meeting, and itt seems drank too hard, for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted.

The gossip notes of Vicar Ward were written, probably, in 1661, about forty-five years after Shakespeare's death, and nearly half a century before Nicholas Rowe, the first editor of the plays of Shakespeare, published, in 1709, what he entitled *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear*, for the "most considerable part" of which he owned a "particular obligation" to Thomas Betterton, whose veneration for the memory of Shakespeare had "engaged him to make a journey into Warwickshire." Rowe's *Account* was the standard biography of the eighteenth century, and is still quoted with confidence by most commentators. Concerning Shakespeare's withdrawal from public affairs, all that is said is that The latter part of his life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish theirs to be, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and, in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford. His pleasurable wit, and good nature, engaged him in the acquaintance, and entitled him to the friendship of gentlemen of the neighborhood.

¹ Sidney Lee, *op. cit.*

The opinion generally held by scholars of today, as has been said, seems to be based upon the second-hand and scanty memorials loosely put together by Nicholas Rowe. Sidney Lee expresses the approximate result of modern conjecture concerning the motives of Shakespeare, in these words:

His literary achievements and successes were chiefly valued as serving the prosaic end of providing permanently for himself and his daughters. His highest ambition was to restore among his fellow-townsmen the family repute which his father's misfortunes had imperiled. Ideals so homely are reckoned rare among poets, but Chaucer and Sir Walter Scott, among writers of exalted genius, vie with Shakespeare in the sobriety of their personal aims and in the sanity of their mental attitude towards life's ordinary incidents.¹

This hypothesis, notwithstanding the fact that it is promulgated by writers of high authority and accepted by popular consent, cannot but appear to some minds unsatisfactory, inconsistent, and repugnant to common sense. One recalls Shakespeare's own exclamation: "O lame and impotent conclusion!" The venture of this essay is to offer, on speculative grounds tenable at least in argument, some objections to the commonly accepted opinion concerning Shakespeare's last years, and to suggest a somewhat different hypothesis for explaining the facts and traditions in controversy.

The principal reasons urged in support of the view held by Lee and others, that Shakespeare relinquished literary pursuits and went back to Stratford in the year 1611, being then forty-seven years of age, and devoted the rest of his life to the material welfare of himself and family, are based upon evidence which may be set forth under the following heads: (1) tradition; (2) Shakespeare's will, and other legal documents; (3) lack of positive testimony contradictory of assumed facts; (4) errors in the First Folio; (5) Shakespeare abandoned dramatic composition about 1611.

Let us consider the force and validity of deductions drawn from these five principal sources.

In the first place, no certainty can ever be derived from tradition; that is, from mere rumor and vague assertion. Neither Ward nor Rowe recorded what he himself knew, but each only repeated or paraphrased the words of other men. Rowe is not sure that Shakespeare returned to Stratford at all! He says Shakespeare "is said to have spent some years" there.

¹ *Op. cit.*

In regard to the witness afforded by Shakespeare's will, and by documents in the Public Record Office relating to his estates and land-purchases, and the like, not much need be said. The author of our most reliable and most recent *History of English Dramatic Literature* admits that the will does not reveal to us "even the slightest corner of Shakespeare's life or character." In it no reference is made to the poet's literary property, but it does not follow from this that he had not anticipated so important a matter, and provided some other means of securing to posterity that intellectual wealth which, as Carlyle strikingly said, outvalues the empire of India. The "Agreements," "Recoveries," and other legal papers which, for Shakespeare as for any other man who owned anything or had any civil interests, were drafted and filed away for reference, are formal records of transactions in no way uncommon.

Coming to the third objection to the acceptance of the facts assumed by Lee and Brandes, and others, it is to be remarked that sound reasoning is not satisfied that any proposition or assertion is true, simply because no positive testimony contradictory of it has been produced. It may be a fact that Wordsworth was destitute of the sense of smell; that, as has been facetiously said, his nose was "an idle promontory projecting into a desert air;" but one hesitates to accept this as a proven certainty merely on the negative evidence that he does not allude to odors of any kind in his poems. So it might have been that Shakespeare lost his sense of beauty or his taste for art when he reached middle life; yet one finds it hard to admit the probability of such deterioration, no matter how positively stated; for, although proof that it was not so may be lacking, the conjecture that it was so outrages the understanding.

The fourth point to be considered—namely, the allegation that many errors which Shakespeare might have been expected to correct appear in the First Folio edition of his dramas—has much force, and, at first thought, seems to support the theory in question. However, it is by no means certain that Shakespeare did not contemplate the revision of his works for the press. Evidence in support of a contrary theory has been discovered in the First Folio. Let the tables be turned on the advocates of the old theory. Can *they* disprove conjecture by opposite conjecture?

The fifth and last of the propositions in dispute assumes that Shakespeare gave up his art after disposing of his stock in the Globe and the Black Friars Theater.

This was in substance what Rowe believed and wrote down in a book, two centuries ago. Essentially this belief, or supposition, has been incorporated into most of the biographies of Shakespeare that have ever been written. Is it proven? Is it true? Is it credible? Is it not absurd?

The theory which supposes that William Shakespeare, in sound health, at the age of only forty-seven, chose to abandon his high estate as thinker and poet, in order to devote his energies to domestic concerns, money-getting, and the conventions of English country life, is repugnant to human reason. The idea is incredible! We instinctively reject it. Almost every Shakespearian writer, great and small, when he comes to tell the old story over, remarks on the wonderfulness of it, and mentions the case as exceptional!

Mr. Mabie, in his *Shakespeare, Poet, Dramatist and Man*, seems almost to apologize for the unaccountable course of the man whose sanity is rightly considered to be undoubted, and whom Emerson characterizes as "inconceivably wise." Mr. Mabie says: "From the standpoint of today he was still a young man; but men grew old much earlier three centuries ago." There is some truth in this, but in a list of twenty of Shakespeare's eminent contemporaries I find that not one of these lived fewer years than three-score, while at least eight of them reached or passed three-score and ten. Bacon and Ben Jonson and Drayton and Raleigh and Burton and Knox and Chapman and Shirley all lived to be old men; Coke was eighty-two when he died, and Herrick eighty-three. The father and the mother of Shakespeare both lived to a ripe old age, and two of his daughters reached nearly three-score and ten; so there can be no doubt that the chances of longevity were in the poet's blood and bone. A modern insurance agent would consider such a man a good risk, with the probabilities of holding out at least twenty years longer.

Common sense is opposed to conjectures usually brought to the support of the wisdom of the notion that Shakespeare changed his habits of mind, and renounced his book and pen, when he sold out his business in London and betook himself to Stratford. If he did

degenerate into a character so commonplace as is ascribed to him, or into the scornful, misanthropic pessimist which Brandes fancies him, it is not strange that, baffled by such a paradox, Delia Bacon regarded him as a "booby" and denied the possibility of his having written the works published under his name. The presumptions of the cryptogram theorists are hardly more preposterous than are the self-contradictory explanations of Shakespeare's alleged conduct in the last eight or ten years of his life. Miss Bacon, in 1853, tells, in one of her letters, how she told Thomas Carlyle that no one who knew the plays attributed to Shakespeare could believe Shakespeare wrote them. "It was then," wrote she, "that Carlyle began to shriek. You could have heard him a mile!" The shriek was natural, and should have settled the controversy. But the method of reasoning which concludes that Shakespeare's "highest ambition was to restore the family repute," and that his "literary achievements were chiefly valued as serving the prosaic end of providing permanently for himself and his daughters," merely because of absence of specific contemporary testimony that he was like other great literary artists in his devotion to ideal, as opposed to mercenary and materialistic, standards of achievement—this method of reasoning—or, better say, of confusing reason—might well be held responsible for the modern "war to the knife against Shakespeare's personality," as Brandes puts it, and for the wild speculations of the Baconians from Joseph Hart to Ignatius Donnelly. The transformed Shakespeare of the Rowe theory, being impossible and inconceivable, must seem a literary impostor—he could never have been the man who wrote *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*! He is a myth! Francis Bacon wrote him! See into what chaos the mind is thrown when it revolts against its own laws. Is there not a simpler and more natural way of explaining and reconciling the facts relating to Shakespeare's plans and occupations during the period extending from 1611 to the time of his unexpected death, some five years later?

Several causes may reasonably be given, any one or all of which will account for the removal from London, Shakespeare's temporary abode and place of business, to Stratford, where his family lived, and which he always regarded as his home.

According to Professor Baynes,¹ it is probable that as early as 1608 Shakespeare decided to return to his native place, "as soon as he could conveniently terminate his London engagements," because of a series of "chequered domestic experiences." His father had died in 1601; his youngest brother, in 1607; his mother, in 1608; his eldest daughter had married in 1607, and, in the next year, had borne an infant, the only grandchild of his that he lived to see. "With these vivid and varied family experiences," says Baynes, "a strong wave of home yearning seems to have set in, which gradually drew the poet back to Stratford."

Or it may have been that, warned by the increasing pressure of Puritan protest against the stage, and foreseeing disaster to his business, he deemed it prudent to avoid risks of future loss, and resolved to make sure of what he had earned by investing it in real estate in Warwickshire.

Another reasonable supposition is that the labors and cares of theatrical management had become irksome, and that he felt the need of rest and the restorative influences of nature. He may have had some premonition of physical breakdown, or, it may be, had experienced some intolerable seizure of mental fatigue or nervous distress, such as not unfrequently follows severe and long-continued effort of brain. The energy which goes to the creation of a great original work of literature or art drains the very soul of its vitality. Carlyle suffered an anguish of reaction as often as he produced a book. It would be easy to multiply instances of the kind in the biography of great thinkers and writers. Within the eight years immediately preceding the time of his "retirement," Shakespeare had brought forth at least twelve of his dramas, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*; and how could he escape the inevitable exhaustion entailed by such prodigious labor of mind? What more natural than that he should seek to restore his strength and cheerfulness by a change of scene and a release from worry?

It was not his intention to give up literature and to lose touch with his old associates; nor did he, after his removal to the country, fail to pay occasional visits to London. He probably planned to economize his forces, bodily and spiritual, to regulate his exertions

¹ T. Spencer Baynes, "Shakespeare," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

according to his own moods, to divide his time between the duties of a freeholder and the pursuits of literary composition, and, perhaps, to revise his dramatic works, in order to secure that "legitimate fame" for which, like his friend Ben Jonson, he must have wished. Doubtless he was a practical man and attended promptly to his business affairs; but, to use the words of Professor Baynes, "he could promptly throw the whole burden aside, and in the exercise of his noble art pierce with an eagle's wing the very highest heaven of invention."

From the conjectures just stated, and from others of similar import, the speculations of this article originate. On what foundation, it will be asked, are these conjectures grounded?

The argument is based on evidence of several kinds, four of which will be presented, in the following order: (1) evidence from tradition and history; (2) evidence from comments and admissions of Shakespearian scholars; (3) character and testimony of Shakespeare's literary contemporaries; (4) internal evidence shown in Shakespeare's writings. Each of these topics will now be briefly examined.

First, the evidence of tradition and history: Lewis Theobald, in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1733, repeats, in quaint language, a current tradition, which, if true, or in any wise approximating to truth, pours a flood of light upon our subject. Theobald says:

How much our Author employ'd himself in Poetry, after his Retirement from the Stage, does not so evidently appear: Very few posthumous Sketches of his Pen have been recover'd to ascertain that Point. We have been told, indeed, in Print, but not till very lately, That two large Chests full of this Great Man's loose Papers and Manuscripts, in the Hands of an ignorant Baker of Warwick (who married one of the Descendants from our Shakespeare), were carelessly scatter'd and thrown about, as Garret-Lumber and Litter, to the particular Knowledge of the late Sir William Bishop, till they were all consumed in the general Fire and Destruction of that Town. I cannot help being a little apt to distrust the Authority of this Tradition; because as his Wife surviv'd him seven Years, and as his Favourite Daughter Susanna surviv'd her twenty-six Years, 'tis very improbable they should allow such a Treasure to be remov'd, and translated into a remoter Branch of the Family, without a Scrutiny first made into the Value of it.¹

¹ D. Nichol Smith, *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (Glasgow, 1903).

Theobald's doubt that Shakespeare's widow and his daughter would suffer those precious chests to be removed and lost, would not be shared by all modern historians. There is little likelihood that Anna Hathaway appreciated her husband or valued his papers. As for the daughter, we may agree with Brandes that "it is inconceivable that Susanna could have any real understanding of, or sympathy with, her father."¹ She was a rabid Puritan, and perhaps thought it a virtuous act to rid the house of a lot of wicked stage-plays.

The manuscripts of Shakespeare may have been lost in the way the tradition declares them to have been, or they may have been destroyed in the author's lifetime, in 1613, when the Globe Theater was burned; what became of them is one of the unknowables. Copies of his plays were extant; else how could his friends and fellow-actors, John Heming and Henry Condell, furnish the material for the First Folio edition of his works, a publication which appeared in 1623, seven years after the death of the author? This query leads us to the important testimony of the "two obscure actors," to whom, in the opinion of Lowell, "posterity owes a greater debt than to any two men living in 1623."

The fact that Heming and Condell were well regarded by their contemporaries is well attested by a memorial poem which forms part of the preliminary matter of the First Folio, and which begins with the words:

Shakespeare, at length thy pious fellows give
The world thy Works.

Furthermore, the will of Shakespeare makes it certain that these two men stood high in his confidence and affection, for, excepting Richard Burbage, they only of his "fellows" were remembered with a token of his intimate regard, each receiving the bequest of "xxvj s viij d. Apeece to buy ringes."

In the dedication prefixed to the First Folio occur these words, addressed to the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Montgomery, and signed by Heming and Condell:

But since your Lordships have beene pleas'd to thinke these trifles something, heertofore; and have prosequuted both them, and their Author living,

¹ *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study.*

with so much favour: we hope, that, (they out-living him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be exequitor to his owne writings) you will use the like indulgence toward them, you have done unto their parent. . . . We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians; without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keepe the memory of so worthy a Friend & Fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare.

The same editors, in a succeeding address to "The Great Variety of Readers," say this:

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himself had liued to haue set forth, and overseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected & publish'd them; and so to have published them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds of injurious impostors, that exposed them: Even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them; who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together; and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.

This testimony, which clearly implies that Shakespeare's most intimate companions had expected him to be executor of his "owne writings," and, indeed, that he had begun the task of revision, is generally slighted by conservative editors.

Passing on from testimony of this class, which is very abundant, we come to an exceedingly important kind of evidence—that adduced from the critics themselves. Although not one of these can be claimed as wholly accepting the view contended for, many, if not most, of these admit that Shakespeare could not have abandoned literary composition altogether after his withdrawal from London.

Charles Knight, reasoning from data derived from a critical comparison of the First Folio edition of the plays and the Quarto copies, is convinced that Shakespeare guarded with "jealous care" the "more important" of his dramas, "so as to leave with his 'fellows' more complete copies than had been preserved by the press." Among British authorities, Knight stands pre-eminent in defense of the conviction that Shakespeare was Shakespeare to the end of his life. In his luminous book, *William Shakespeare: A Biography*, published in 1843, he speaks as follows:

Every one agrees that during the last three or four years of his life Shakespeare ceased to write, yet we venture to think that every one is in error. . . . There were no circumstances, as far as we can collect, to have prevented him finally leaving London several years before 1613. But his biographers, having fixed a period for the termination of his connection with the active business of the theater, assume that he became wholly unemployed; that he gave himself up, as Rowe described, to "ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends." . . . But when the days of pleasure arrived, is it reasonable to believe that the mere habit of his life would not assert its ordinary control; that the greatest of intellects would suddenly sink to the condition of an every-day man—cherishing no high plans for the future, looking back with no desire to equal and excell the work of the past? At the period of life when Chaucer began to write the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare, according to his biographers, was suddenly and utterly to cease to write. We can not believe it.

Another witness, August Schlegel, the first and perhaps the greatest of the æsthetic school of Shakespearian interpreters, in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, says:

It would be singular indeed if Shakespeare, notwithstanding the modesty of a great mind, which he certainly possessed in a peculiar degree, should never have dreamed of posthumous fame. . . . What foundation, then, is there for the contrary assertion, which would degrade the immortal artist to the condition of a daily laborer for a rude multitude?—Merely this, that he himself published no edition of his whole works. . . . it is . . . not impossible that the right of property in his unprinted pieces was no longer vested in Shakespeare, or had not at least yet reverted to him.—His fellow managers entered on the publication seven years after his death, (which probably cut short his intention), as it would appear, on their own account and for their own advantage¹.

Ward admits, as do most Shakespearian writers, that *Henry VIII* was written after the year 1611. Dowden, while not allowing that Shakespeare wrote much at Stratford, is, like Knight, reluctant to believe that the master had parted from his genius, broken his staff, and drowned his book "deeper than did ever plummet sound." "Prospero," he acknowledges, "must forever have remained somewhat apart from other dukes and Warwickshire magnificoes, by virtue of the enchanted island and the marvelous years of mageship."²

Arguing from the character and report of his literary contemporaries, Shakespeare could not have been the person invented by Rowe and patented perpetually by succeeding biographers. He

¹ August Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.

² Edward Dowden, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*.

was the choice and master-spirit of the wits and singers of the period—"soul of the age!"—the "spacious times" of Elizabeth. The fact that Bacon did not recognize the greatness of Shakespeare, though strange, is not inexplicable. Herbert Spencer, in his interminable *Autobiography* does not mention Tennyson, and names Wordsworth only to disparage him. But, in that elder day, Edmund Spenser unerringly discerned the transcendent genius

Whose Muse, full of high thoughts invention,
Doth like himself herocially sound.¹

It requires a poet, or at least a poetic temperament, to discover and appreciate a poet. Schlegel and Goethe and Coleridge are illuminating diviners and interpreters of Shakespeare. Ben Jonson's lines, "To the memory of my beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us," is worth more as an appraisal of Shakespeare the artist than a whole library of ordinary criticism. What knowledge, what insight, in the words:

. . . . he
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the Muses' anvil; turn the same,
And himself with it, that he thinks to fame;
Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn;
For a good poet's made, as well as born.
And such wert thou!

This Shakespeare whom Jonson knew—who, with the sweat of his immortal soul, shaped upon the Muses' anvil the lines which were to render poem and poet famous—was not the easy-going husbandman, or the money-loving William Shakespeare, Gentleman, of Stratford, who had dropped poetry and taken up "contentment" as a vocation.

In this connection one recalls the oft-repeated and well-attested story of that last supper which the three congenial poets, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Drayton, had together in Stratford, a short time before Shakespeare's death. Jonson had come up from London, probably to attend the wedding of Shakespeare's daughter, and the two were entertained by their honored and beloved friend. Tradition says they took rather too many cups of kindness on the occasion. Whether

¹ "Colin Clouts Come Home Againe," ll. 446, 447.

Shakespeare and his boon-brothers drank sack or canary, deponent sayeth not, but we may well believe they talked about books and poems and plays, and not much about things of this world. Drayton had recently (1605) reprinted his most important works, and Jonson was preparing for the press the first volume of the Folio edition of his dramas, which came out within the same year, a few months after Shakespeare's death. We can fancy there might have been some intimate canvassing as to Shakespeare's literary labors and intentions.

No, Shakespeare's last years were not spent in ease and contentment. His literary successes were not valued chiefly for the prosaic end of "providing" houses and lands and food and raiment for himself and his daughters. His chief aims were less material, less sordid. His highest ambition was not to restore the family repute. *He* was family repute! Nor was he unlike other poets, except in greater greatness.

How doubt that Shakespeare, measurer of worth,
Gaged his own measure? Was that splendor dim
Which should outsplendor all the names of earth,
Was that, now dazzling us, obscure to him?

Did he all realms of human thought explore
And search all nature to its heart of fire,
Yet his own majesty of man ignore
In London playwright and in Stratford Squire?¹

Is it conceivable that the Shakespeare who with jealous precaution guarded his dead ashes—"Curst be he that moves my bones!"—had no forethought to preserve his fame? The strongest refutation of such an assumption is to be found in the writings of Shakespeare himself. Read the plays, the long poems, the *Sonnets*, and be convinced. He did think of the sweetness of being remembered after death, as witness Hamlet's bitter speech to Ophelia: "O heavens! died two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year; but, by 'r lady, he must build churches then; or else shall he suffer not thinking on." Assuredly Shakespeare was confident that his own work would survive the centuries, as his sonnets abundantly testify.

¹ Coates Kinney, "Mists of Fire."

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.¹

Sidney Lee says that "Chaucer and Scott, among writers of exalted genius, vie with Shakespeare in the sobriety of their personal aims," etc. This may readily be granted, and it is also true that they, like other poets, were so much in love with their art that they never forsook it.

Chaucer, at Woodstock with the nightingales,
At sixty wrote the Canterbury Tales,²

and Scott on his death-bed still continued the work of his imagination. Milton and Wordsworth and Browning pursued their ideals to the last, and Tennyson, approaching the bourn whence no traveler returns, encouraged the faltering faith of his soul by reading the dirge in "Cymbeline," doubtless moved thereto by the closing lines:

Quiet consummation have,
And *renowned* be thy grave.

"Look here, upon this picture and on this," of Shakespeare in the last years of his life at Stratford—the one sketched by Rowe, and since retouched with bolder coloring by many pencils, the other portrayed in the light of a new hypothesis. Both are attempts at a correct likeness, and necessarily have much in common; but they differ in some essential features. Which is the truer representation of the real Shakespeare?

The later conception would delineate a man in the prime of life, successful in all his undertakings, unrivaled in his achievements in the highest department of literary endeavor, applauded by every rank, from "Eliza and our James," on the throne, to the groundlings in the pit of the Black Friars. His way of life is accompanied by "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends." As regards fortune, he is "seated in the mean;" not cursed with the "superfluity" which "comes sooner by white hairs," but blest with the "competency" which "lives longer." And he would live longer and accomplish more, not planning to die, but rather to take a new lease of strength and ambition. If sick or weary from overtasks, he would recuperate and then resume his high calling. The period is transitional in his career; he has turned a new chapter, not closed the

¹ Sonnet LV.

² Longfellow, "Morituri Salutamus."

book. Perhaps he will, at leisure, go over all his works, as he had gone over portions of *Hamlet* and of other plays, correcting errors and adding new matter. Certainly he will not abandon his art or stop thinking. Unless incapacitated by sickness, he will be no less absorbed in the "business of his dreams" after his retirement from theatrical management, than before.

Scientific method seeks a generalization which will reconcile apparently conflicting data. The prevailing unpsychological interpretation of the known facts of Shakespeare's last years at Stratford has led to strange vagaries. It has transformed the greatest man of all time into a chimerical myth. It has distorted criticism whenever an attempt has been made to interpret Shakespeare's works in the light of his supposed character. In this paper, while attention has been focused upon the period of his life regarding which the least is known, the facts of his entire career have been kept constantly in mind. May not the hypothesis here offered suggest a means by which the harsh and jangled bells of diverse opinion may be put into harmony?